



*Dudhatoli Vikas Samiti has constructed these small ponds as part of rainwater harvesting initiatives in the hills of Pauri Garhwal.*

# Development in Uttarakhand

Text by GOVIND SINGH  
Photographs by DAN JANTZEN

**E**conomic development without giving due care to the needs of local residents and future generations can lead to disastrous results. This is why the World Commission on Environment and Development, in its 1987 report, called for “economic and social development that meets the needs of the current generation without undermining the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

The Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro in 1992 outlined a distinct roadmap to sustainable development, firmly entrenched in the idea of people’s participation in the development process. It strove for a balance between development and local necessities; development without degradation of natural resources.

In the context of Uttarakhand, the five-year-old hill state, the issue of sustainable development assumes even greater importance because of its location in the ecologically sensitive zone of the Himalayas. It comprises fragile hills, snow-capped mountains, glaciers, thick green forests and teeming wildlife. Since the Himalayas are susceptible to seismic forces, and Uttarakhand is in the heart of a high-threat seismic zone, the problem is more acute and multifaceted. The glaciers are melting, green cover is shrinking while jungles of concrete are emerging, wildlife is in danger, and several animals and birds are on the verge of extinction. Yet the projects to protect

these animals are causing problems to the local people and thus creating unrest. People complain that they are not consulted when development plans are drawn up.

The new state is witnessing a development boom. At the same time its population has always shown a positive approach toward environment protection as seen during the famous Chipko (tree-hugging) movement in the 1970s or more recent agitations against the Tehri Dam and Nanda Devi Biosphere reserve. So Uttarakhand, as it stands at the crossroads, is an interesting study. Pahar, a Nainital-based NGO, has organized four trekking expeditions since 1974 to enable writers, journalists and teachers to investigate the region’s socioeconomic development. Last year the team included Dan Jantzen from Denver, Colorado, associated with Future Generations, an American NGO. It leads a worldwide research effort on how to improve people’s lives and protect the environment. It coordinated community-based expansion across the Himalayan states of Uttarakhand and Arunachal Pradesh, promoting social development and a network of nature preserves. Jantzen was so impressed with the activities in Uttarakhand that he returned this February to participate in a workshop on sustainable development conducted by Future Generations in Dehra Dun and also to help Pahar prepare geographical information system (GIS) and global positioning system (GPS) maps of the state.

As a former teacher at the Woodstock School in

Mussoorie, Jantzen was familiar with the hills of Uttaranchal, but wanted to study the changes wrought by rapid development since the state was carved out of Uttar Pradesh in 2000. From Askote, near the border with Tibet, to the town of Arakot in the western part of the state, the journey was an eye-opener.

The emotional highpoint was a meeting in Samdhar, a village in Chamoli district. "More than 100 people crowded into the classroom in which our group of 10 was going to sleep," he says. Villagers reported on the problems they encounter in everyday life:

- The locally-built bridge collapsed when a wedding party was returning to the village, drowning three people in the river;
- The difficulty in getting children educated after class V because of the distance of secondary schools;
- The efforts of a retired army man, now a schoolteacher, to prepare the students for a world in which they start with few resources and even fewer advantages;
- The problems that lack of education brought to a woman *sarpanch* from Jantzen's expedition team, who tearfully encouraged the village kids to stay in school.

"Perhaps the most disturbing trend, evident from the expedition and our interaction with villagers, was the tendency to look for the government to solve problems," says Jantzen. "The self-reliance of the mountain villager I knew as a child now seems to have evaporated. Nowadays, people do not even think of what they might be able to do for themselves to solve a problem, but rather immediately assume it is the government's job. Then they blame the government for not doing enough." He says the root of the problem is the tendency of politicians seeking votes to promise they will see that the government does all that is needed.

Over-exploitation of forest resources leads to lack of fodder for cattle. That means less manure for the fields and reduced productivity. So the hill agricultural economy is in a downward spiral, with each generation having a weaker base to work from. Part of the problem is that people have not adapted to modern agricultural practices. Basic subsistence comes to families in what is aptly called the "money-order economy," where relatives back home depend on remittances from the earning members working in the Indian plains or abroad. The long absence of menfolk creates social problems and deprives the communities of leaders. The longer-term solution must involve some combination of finding ways to earn a respectable income in the hills either from horticulture, tourism, small industry or information technology.

To understand the basic problems and share the success stories, Future Generations conducts workshops for NGO activists working at the grassroots. The two Americans who led the Future Generations training have an Uttaranchal connection. Carl Taylor, 88, was born in



*Villagers in Purola, Uttarakashi district, have learned to market agricultural produce with assistance from NGOs.*



## American NGO Future Generations is involved in the hill state

Landour, Mussoorie, and spent his boyhood in the Dehra Dun area. His son, Daniel, is president of Future Generations and educated in Mussoorie. They trained 50 activists from across the country to use the seed-scale methodology to stimulate and direct community change. About 20 workers were from Uttaranchal, representing NGOs such as the Sri Bhuvaneshwari Mahila Ashram, Chirag, and Mahila Samakhya.

Seed-scale methodology forms partnerships of the communities, the government and outside change agents such as NGOs, universities, villagers who return home. But the real zeal for change should come from the community, responding to its own needs and making decisions according to its requirements.

Shri Bhuvaneshwari Mahila Ashram has adopted a successful approach. Two to three activists visit a panchayat and meet the leaders, requesting them to collect data on education, health, agriculture, economics, forest and environment in their village. This data is analyzed at village meetings.

According to Jantzen, "Typically, the findings are that the villagers can address many problems themselves. For example, the issue of child education, the dropout rate from schools, the need to have schools nearby, and the vaccination of children for debilitating diseases. The government health worker can be called to vaccinate the children, ways can be found to encourage children to go to school. The entire community is encouraged to develop an annual work plan stating the problems, who will do what and when.

"Other problems require intervention of the government, like opening of a school or a hospital or constructing a bridge. If you have enough relevant information, you can approach the government in a better way," adds Jantzen.

Future Generations proposes that the process become an annual event. As some success is achieved, more people are attracted and participation improves. Future Generations cites the success story of Dehra Dun-based Himalayan Action Research Centre, which is helping farmers in the Purola Valley to produce tomatoes, beans and capsicum for the markets in the plains. They have had great success in organizing farming communities, introducing new crops, linking producers with markets, and organizing farmers into an effective group. Another example is Dudhatoli Vikas Samiti, which is engaged in construction of ponds to harvest rainwater in the Pauri Garhwal Hills, where deforestation has caused water scarcity.

Sunil Kainthola, of the Nanda Devi Campaign for Cultural Survival and Sustainable Livelihoods in the High Himalayas, says,

"We are witnessing the rise of economic prosperity. But what is being lost in all this is our tradition of collective labor. Earlier people would work together to achieve the most difficult tasks, but now they need outside help for everything. Every issue demands setting up of a project. It seems to me that sometimes people have no faith in their own abilities." □